

Little Mountain Travel Management Plan Environmental Assessment, 2005 Amendment, 2010

DOI-BLM-WY-020-2010-76-EA

Wind River/Bighorn Basin District,

Cody Field Office, Cody, Wyoming



August 2010

The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.

BLM/WY/PL-10/040+1220

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The development of the Little Mountain Travel Management Plan, along with the NEPA process was accomplished with the help of local county commissioners, state representatives, active members of the community, and specialists of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) interdisciplinary team from the Cody Field Office.

Early concepts shaped the Travel Management Plan and the type of NEPA analysis required for this project. Since 1990, when the first Cody Resource Management Plan (RMP) was completed and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and Record of Decision (ROD), was signed on November 8, 1990, the Little Mountain area was identified as motorized vehicle use "Limited to Designated Roads and Trails." This designation required the development of a Travel Management Plan

Planning meetings and listening sessions helped to bring differences to light and the BLM strived for resolution. The BLM held several meetings from 2004-2006, ending when the Environmental Assessment (EA) and Decision Record (DR) were signed. The activity plan was also completed on November 16, 2006, with the publishing of a news release.

The BLM issued a news release on October 2, 2009, as was required in the Decision Record of 2006, announcing the implementation of the travel management plan. This announcement stated the initial phase of the travel management plan would be characterized by public education and information. It included a description of the area affected, signing, seasonal closure dates for a portion of the area, background information including the public involvement opportunities which were provided during the planning process, and the website address for more information.

Since 2009, the BLM has been signing designated roads as open or closed per the 2006 Decision Record and completed Travel Management Plan. When the signs began to be posted on Little Mountain, comments about the signing and route location began to be reported to the BLM.

The CYFO was contacted by Keith Grant (Big Horn County Commissioner) and Elaine Harvey (House District 26 Representative, Big Horn and Park Counties, Wyoming) and Field Manager (FM) Mike Stewart, met with both Keith and Elaine and toured Little Mountain to listen and see their issues.

Resulting from the issues and concerns the Field Manager heard while visiting with Commissioner Grant and Representative Harvey, the BLM then hosted a "Listening Session" on April 15, 2010 in Lovell, Wyoming. This was to receive feedback after the first year of implementation of the travel management plan. Two news releases were issued announcing the meeting. Comments, questions, and answers can be seen respectively in Appendices A and B of this document, which lists those taken during the listening session.

1.2 THE DECISION TO BE MADE

The BLM would decide whether or not to change road designation on approximately nine (9) roads that are incorporated in the 2005/2006 Little Mountain Travel Management Plan.

OR

The BLM may also choose to not change anything with regard to the Little Mountain Travel Management Plan and leave the Activity Plan as current management.

1.3 PURPOSE & NEED

The purpose of the proposed action is to correct oversights in the original 2005/2006 Travel Management Plan and to assess new information that has come to light since the first environmental assessment, this may result in changes to road designations.

Changing the Little Mountain Travel Management Plan would allow for several options for management to choose from that would take into consideration further recreational enhancement and enjoyment and allow for better management of resources.

The need is to respond to the public when they ask for changes in management and to fulfill our mandates to respond to the public and protect resources.

1.4 CONFORMANCE WITH LAND USE PLAN

The alternatives are in conformance with the Cody Resource Management Plan (RMP), Final Environmental Impact Statement, and Record of Decision, signed November 8, 1990.

In addition, in order to amend the Little Mountain Travel Management Activity Plan, a clause was set allowing management to make changes to portions of the travel area without wholesale activity planning having to take place. The clause is taken from the 2006, Decision Record from EA (WY020-EA05-049):

“This document amends the travel management plan to include the following described route in the appropriate road use category” (See Appendix D, Proposed Action Map)

Modifications or additions to the route designations may be necessary to address proposal for new routes associated with rights-of-way or other permitted activities on public lands; to address future public access needs, or changing resource concerns; or to address the appropriate management of existing routes that are not represented on the inventory map. Any proposed changes would be subject to review and determination based on the goals and objectives and route selection criteria in this plan.

The official Travel Map will be updated as needed to reflect any approved modifications or additions. The revised map will be posted in the BLM Cody Field Office and will be available for distribution to the public.

2.0 PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Two alternatives have been selected to be analyzed. The alternatives came from information given during the listening sessions the BLM had with the public and also with the BLM interdisciplinary team.

2.1 Alternative I – Proposed Action

The proposed action would be to change the Little Mountain Travel Management Plan/Activity Plan. Roads within the Little Mountain Travel Management Plan/Activity Plan area may need designation changes to meet resource protection and access needs in the Little Mountain area.

The proposed action involves a decision on the part of the Authorized Officer (AO) to choose from the roads listed below to satisfy the purpose and need. The letters identify options which may include closing or opening roads or portions of roads; timing or seasonal restrictions on roads or portions of roads; and vehicles or ATVs which would be allowed in the areas under consideration for this alternative.

Choosing among the letters (below) would satisfy the reasons for amending the Travel Management Plan/Activity Plan; for the continued enjoyment of recreation and hunting on Little Mountain.

A. Southern route on Mexican Hill – Change to designation to open to match the Bighorn National Forest Travel Management Plan (this is a well-used route and would be useful when the northern route is drifted in).

B./C. Two short, dead-end routes – Keep designation as closed (road is rehabilitating).

D./E. Two routes to top of Mexican Hill – Keep closed (steep, erosion, and duplicate routes).

F. Change designation to closed to match the Bighorn National Forest Travel Management Plan (the route passes through a short distance of BLM-managed public land). The Forest Service is planning a reroute of the northern end of the Cottonwood Creek Trail. This reroute would allow non-motorized users to use the Cottonwood Creek Trail and avoid the area by the state land cabin.

G.1. Simmons/Volpats route

a) Open route designation to ATV's except during the seasonal closure and during hunting season (from the beginning of archery season through close of rifle season) allow ATV use only for a two hour time period from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm for game retrieval. The rest of the day the route would be closed during hunting season. During late spring and summer the route would be open to ATVs.

b) Same as a) but only applies to first one mile of road where it intersects with or crosses Simmons Canyon).

c) All year long the route would be designated closed to motor vehicles except to ATVs for the purpose of game retrieval during hunting season. Game retrieval times 11:00 am to 1:00 pm.

- d) Close entire route to vehicles all year.
- G.2. Keep designation as closed (very short dead-end route).
- G.3. Keep designation as closed (very short dead-end route, road is rehabilitating).
- G.4. Keep designation as closed (very faint, rehabilitated route, duplicate route).
- H.1. Change designation to open (best route for trucks).
- H.2. Keep designation as closed (faint, duplicate route).
- H.3. Keep designation open (ATVs often use this route).
- I.1. Change designation to open (there is a gate and a cattle-guard on this route).
- I.2. Change designation to closed (duplicate route and blocked by fence).
- J. Change designation to open (best of duplicate routes).
- K. Change designation to closed (worst of duplicate routes).
- L. Keep designation as closed (very rough route on northern half).
- M. Devil's Canyon Road (clarify legend on map). Motorized use allowed for administrative purposes only.
- N. Keep designation as closed (resource protection).
- O. Keep designation as closed (duplicate route nearby, dead-end).
- P. Change designation to closed (short, rehabilitated, duplicate route).
- Q. Keep designation closed (duplicate routes, riparian habitat).
- R. Keep designation closed (rehabilitated, it is within the Five Springs Falls ACEC which allows motorized use only on campground roads; it is within a Lynx Analysis Unit where snowmobile use is not allowed).

2.2 Alternative II – No Action Alternative

The No Action alternative would be to leave the situation on Little Mountain as currently described in the Little Mountain Travel Management Plan. No road designations would change, no segments of roads would be changed, and the current seasonal closure on the high country would remain in effect

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This document is an amendment to the Little Mountain Travel Activity Plan, 2005, EA and the Decision Record 2006.

There are no new circumstances or resources, issues, or concerns that would need to be analyzed here, with the exception of Lands with Wilderness Characteristics. For all other resources, please refer to the Little Mountain Activity Plan EA 2005, at the following website address:

<http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/info/NEPA/cyfodocs.html>

3.1 LANDS WITH WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

The Cody Field Office is currently working on a Resource Management Plan Revision with the Worland Field Office. This Management Plan is referred to as the Bighorn Basin Resource Management Plan Revision which covers the Bighorn Basin. Part of the planning process requires the BLM examine lands which may have wilderness characteristics. The Cody Field Office found 13 such areas and among those 13, one (1) lies in the Little Mountain TMP area; Trout Creek.

Trout Creek met the criteria of generally being affected by the forces of nature with the imprint of man substantially unnoticeable. There are other criteria to meet as well, you may read the evaluation sheets at the following website address and click on the link that says "Multiple Use Lands with Wilderness Characteristics":

http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/field_offices/Cody.html

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

This document is an amendment to the Little Mountain Travel Management Plan, 2005 EA. All resources, issues, and concerns that would need to be analyzed for impacts/affected are presented in the 2005 EA.

There are no new effects beyond those discussed in the 2005 EA that would need to be disclosed, with the exception of Lands with Wilderness Characteristics. For discussion of impacts for all other resources, please refer to the Little Mountain Activity Plan EA 2005, at the following website address:

<http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/info/NEPA/cyfodocs.html>

4.1 LANDS WITH WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

4.1.1 Alternative I – Proposed Action

Policy directs the BLM to analyze impacts to lands with wilderness characteristics if land use changes may result in a change in the character of these lands.

Trout Creek demonstrates lands with wilderness characteristics. This area lies in the Little Mountain TMP area, but no route changes are proposed within it.

Therefore none of the proposed road changes would impact the area that was shown to have wilderness characteristics at this point in the planning process.

4.1.2 Alternative II – No Action

The land with wilderness characteristics would not be affected by Alternative II, the No Action alternative. Roads that are under deliberation for this amendment are not within the area of Trout Creek.

5.0 CONSULTATION & COORDINATION

Please see the original 2005 EA for list of federal, state, and local governments, and public participants at the following web address:

<http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/info/NEPA/cyfodocs.html>

6.0 LIST OF PREPARERS

Ann Perkins – Planning & Environmental Coordinator

Shirley Bye-Jech – Recreation Planner

Bill Wilson – GIS Specialist

Destin Harrell – Wildlife Biologist

6.1 List of Reviewers

Fred McDonald – Assistant Field Manager

Christopher Carleton – Planning and Environmental Coordinator – WYSO

Ken Peacock – Planning and Environmental Coordinator – WYSO – State Lead

Lesly Smith – Recreation Planner – WYSO – State Lead

7.0 REFERENCES

Please see the original 2005 EA and FONSI and 2006 DR for list of federal, state, and local governments, and public participants at the following web address:

<http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/info/NEPA/cyfodocs.html>

APPENDIX A

COMMENTS TAKEN FROM MAPS AT LISTENING STATIONS APRIL 15, 2010

**Little Mountain Travel Management Plan Listening Session
Comments from the Public at Map Stations**

Roads A, D, E Have to keep road open to Forest on Mexican Hills, all roads except one.

ATV roads near Yellowtail near MT are great roads for ATV use (greatest ATV area in Northern Wyoming).

Road G1 Simmons Canyon closure should be ATV.

Road L Keep canyon closed on head of Oasis.

Roads J, K Ok with reversal on Little Mountain.

Have to close roads around the mine.

Road N ATV roads on border of T58, T57 - leave main artery open.
Ok with seasonal closure on top.

Better send someone to enforce road closures; BLM has too few Law Enforcement Officers.

Road G1 Leave Simmons Road open to ATVs.

Road P Ok to close road near gravel pit.

Would be nice to pursue a foot trail down Devil's Canyon to the lake.

Road G1 Simmons Road should be open during hunting season & closed otherwise.

Pull the big rocks out and not improve John Blue Road.

Roads B, C Keep roads closed (spur roads on Mexican Hills) until calving season is over, then open.
Could make spur roads available during the summer and during hunting season for handicapped persons using ATVs only.

Road G1 Leave Simmons Road open for game retrieval.

Road M About the gate at Devil's Canyon - why is it there?

How do I get to other side of Porcupine Creek?

Supports multi-use areas (horses, 4x4s, bikes).

Does not want cross-country travel with 4-wheelers but still wants open areas for horseback and hiking.

Porcupine Jeep trail signs? 10-15 years ago (In Section 18-19)

Concerned about locations of seasonal closure; not a problem for December 1st-April 30th.

Road N Wants to drive on closed roads that push down onto National Park Service, north of Bighorn Canyon.

Do I impact more with a bicycle or horse? Wants more mountain bike routes open. Can I drive mountain bikes anywhere/closed roads?

Upset about no specific reason for closed routes.

Road M Devil's Canyon should be open through gate for ATVs because it is not dangerous.

Comments on roads on Trust for Public Lands (TPL) property:

Leave main routes open for placement of bear baits including a main loop. The western portion of the loop route might be the only way out if snow falls, the main road drifts in. Check orthophotoquads and maps to see if roads dead end on the TPL land or if they continue onto BLM-managed public lands south of the TPL property. Note: The TPL property is in the process of becoming BLM-managed land. Once that occurs, vehicle routes on the land will be inventoried and assessed and the Travel Management Plan will be amended again.

Road G1 Wants road to the Fingers left open. If shooting from the top down into the Fingers, can't get animal out unless dropping back down onto closed roads.

Concerned about all of the closed roads.

Roads D, E Close these. Commonly has seen 4-wheelers chasing elk opening morning. Need to close these roads.

No one enforces closures; honest people vs. the people

Road G1 Volpat/Fingers Hunters like to shoot elk and pick them up on lower road; have been doing this for years.

Roads D, E Keep roads to top of Mexican Hills closed - around sides, ok to open.

Road G1 Road below Fingers should stay open.

Need enforcement if closing roads.

Road R Keep old Highway 14A closed to motorized vehicles.

Maintain access for grazing lessees and mining claimants.

Inquired about extent of the Craig Thomas/Little Mountain Special Management Area.

Inquired about Cottonwood Creek Trailhead access.

Inquired about Moncur Springs possible resort development (would owner need BLM permit to ride horses on BLM (customers) – YES)

He thought this meeting was about RMP Revision. Inquired about the Little Mountain Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Road N Concerning rules for mountain biking - Are mountain bikes allowed on the purple ATV routes above the National Recreation Area (NRA) and on down onto the NRA?

Support seasonal closure. Didn't like Forest Service closures and ours on Mexican Hill. It is an 8-hour ride one-way up Cottonwood Creek Trail and over to the Bucking Mule Falls Trailhead. Not for horses not in shape; not for beginning riders either.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM LISTENING SESSION APRIL 15, 2010.

Questions and comments raised during the Question and Answer portion of the Little Mountain Travel Management Plan Implementation Listening Session held at the Lovell Community Center on April 15, 2010.

Question: What is the goal for closing roads? Why close the ½ or ¼ mile roads on Mexican Hill?

- Answer: The Little Mountain Travel Management plan identified several route selection criteria that would be used for selecting or closing roads. They are found on pages 27 and 28 of the plan. The short roads in the Mexican Hills area were closed due to erosion concerns (Roads D and E) .

Simmons Canyon – Makes no sense to close that road (Road G1).

It provides access to scenic views and is needed for game retrieval.

If closed it could be opened back up during hunting season.

Elk pass through there rather than staying there.

There is more cover about half way up the face.

Whether you hike in or drive in and shoot an elk, they will move anyway.

Some people don't/can't have access to horses for hunting (age, physical problems) and need motorized access.

The old highway 14A roadbed could be opened up for ATV use and be used to retrieve game animals. It would only take a short time with a piece of equipment to open up the roadbed (Road R).

The road by Simmons Canyon (down the fingers, Road G1) is a good road and is used as a retrieval road. Persons who drive up above and shoot an elk can't retrieve it directly to the main road due to the rocky cliffs. So you drive down the Simmons Canyon road and then walk over to retrieve the game?

The idea of allowing use on the road during certain times of the day during hunting season to allow access for retrieval of game was discussed. This might be better than a total closure of the road.

Question: There is a problem getting game animals out of that area if you can't use the road.

- Answer: The intent was to provide an area that was open only to foot or horseback for the following reasons: 1). Provides an area with greater security for elk that would be accessed only by foot or horseback. 2) Provides an opportunity for hunters who prefer a more primitive hunting experience.

Question: How many roads were closed due to erosion problems? Close those but leave open the rest of the roads that hunters use. We don't want to destroy the mountain.

People who are disabled or lazy can't get the animal out.

Would the game retrieval time be on an honor system? Needs to be enforced.

In Jackson, can take as many people in to retrieve an animal as you want but they can't hunt.

If you don't enforce it, the roads won't stay closed.

Question: How would the road be opened for game retrieval?

- Answer: The road could be signed rather than gated. Enforcement could be made a priority during key times.

You would want to abide by the retrieval times if there is a hefty fine.

Retrieval times might not work if you shoot an animal late and have to wait till the next retrieval time; if warm weather meat might spoil, or a bear might eat it. Does the animal have to be left there if you are past the retrieval time?

Suggested retrieval times: 10:00 am to 1:00 pm or 2:00 pm. Then again after dark (about one hour after sunset). *(Note: this is not a BLM response, rather a comment from the session).*

Good thing that Little Mountain was seasonally closed with locked gates. Need to leave elk alone during winter so they will stay there.

Keith Grant received several complaints from lion hunters about the seasonal closure.

Not much rough country for cats.

It behooves all of us to work on enforcement, enforce ourselves and our neighbors.

Question: What do you do if you find violators?

- Answer: Could call BLM/WGFD. WGFD could make the contact and pass on information to BLM to follow up on. In addition, violators would likely be reported by other hunters who note the violation.

Little Mountain is a showcase for Lovell and for Wyoming. We should seek cooperative agreements with other law enforcement agencies.

Bear hunters want to place bait out before May 1 (7 days before) but seasonal closure goes through April 30th. Any exceptions to the regulations? Could we issue a special permit?

The seasonal restriction helps reduce use of muddy roads and provides security for sage grouse breeding areas.

There are only a few bear hunters in the area.

It is still an issue with sage grouse even if not for elk.

We could consider granting an exception to an individual (after consulting with WGFD).

Question: Why did we burn in the Hayes Trail area?

- Answer: To reduce juniper encroachment and stimulate grass and riparian vegetation production.

The elk are on Little Mountain because of burning in Devils Canyon and elsewhere on the mountain.

When lots of snow on top, limited to where can hunt; get hog-tied by terrain and access.

Question: Would BLM be interested in buying Lowemiller Ranch if we could? It would tie everything together.

Moss Ranch would open up a lot more area than Lowemiller would.

Question: Any talk about closing Devil's Canyon Road (Road M)? If the road were opened up to lots of public use, it would get really trashed.

- Answer: The plan indicates that the road in Devils Canyon is open to the public for foot, mountain bike, or horseback access and can be used by ATV or full size vehicles for administrative access by the Moss Ranch or those working with/for them.

Question: Can we buy copies of updated map?

- Answer: BLM will check on making them available. The large maps such as those used at the meeting would be fairly expensive.

Question: Some roads are closed that go to really beautiful vistas (seem to go nowhere). Can we negotiate?

Question: What is the process now?

- Answer: We will determine what changes may need to be made and what NEPA process would need to be used to make those changes.

Let us know any changes via press release (which would include the web site location of the updated map) and share with Keith Grant.

Question: Can we have a pamphlet (map) when we buy OHV sticker?

Suggestion: Have handout maps available at locations where OHV stickers are sold and at the Lovell Chamber of Commerce office, as well as other locations

BLM Response: BLM will check with local vendors to see if they can make space available to provide maps to the public.

Suggestion: Put a map container at head of CCC Road right at the gate.

BLM Response: OK

Suggestion: Keith Grant would like a large map (when updated) to post at the Fire Hall.

BLM Response: OK

Note: The Wyoming State OHV sticker program was discussed. There are questions about what the requirements are for lands managed by different agencies.

Note: A meeting like this next year may be a good idea.

Note: A mountain bike recreationist asked that we consider allowing mountain bike use on the Cottonwood Creek Trail. See the Little Mountain Travel Management Plan, Activity Plan, and EA (2005/2006), for information on this topic. The trail will remain closed to mountain bike use.

APPENDIX C – MAP 1

NO ACTION – CURRENT SITUATION

APPENDIX D – MAP 2

PROPOSED ACTION